

**An assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of the
South African Social Security Agency in the Northern and
Western Cape Provinces**

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DECLARATION

I, Donald Edward Joseph declare that

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is my own work, that all the sources used or quoted have been duly acknowledged by means of complete reference and that I have not previously submitted the thesis for a degree at another University.

Donald Edward Joseph

ABSTRACT

An assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of the South African Social Security Agency in the Northern and Western Cape provinces

Key words: social grants, beneficiary, South African Social Security Agency, pay-point, pay cycle, front-line staff, pay-point team member, process-evaluation, implementation-evaluation, SOCPEN.

The research was directed at assessing the strengths and weaknesses in the application-to-approval process of social grants up to the payment of social grants at pay-points in the South African Social Security Agency (hereafter SASSA).

The general aim of the research project was to assess the application-to-approval process of grant administration in SASSA up to the payment of social grants at pay-points. The specific objectives of the study were therefore:

- To describe the current application-to-approval process of grant administration;
- To assess the strengths and weaknesses in the grant administration process of specified administrative procedures and structural issues as perceived by attesting officials (front-line staff responsible for taking down the grant applications), data-capturer officials (staff responsible for capturing the information on the application form onto the SOCPEN system, pay-point team members (staff responsible for rendering services at pay-points) and beneficiaries at pay-points; and
- To provide a report on the strengths and weaknesses of the grant administration process from application to pay-out to the top management of SASSA.

The study was conducted in two regions, namely the Northern Cape and the Western Cape. Various offices in the Northern Cape and the Western Cape were therefore part of the research. The grant administration process from application-to-approval includes various stages. The staff members include the screening official (step one) who checks the completeness of the required documentation, followed by attesting official (step two) who takes down the application and captures it on

SOCPEN and then forwards it to the next level, namely quality control (step three). Thereafter a verifying official verifies the information captured on SOCPEN against documentation submitted and approves or rejects the application on SOCPEN (step four). Staff at pay-points (where beneficiaries receive their payments) and beneficiaries at pay-points were also part of the research focus.

Four different data-collection instruments were therefore used during the research project. The first data-collection instrument was designed to collect data on the actual grant application process and problems and strengths in this regard (questionnaire front-line staff). The empirical investigation revealed the following with regard to the front-line staff:

- The majority of front-line staff have considerable working experience (more than five years) in SASSA;
- The majority of front-line staff have inadequate work space;
- Training, supervision and mentoring support from supervisors and colleagues occurs haphazardly;
- The majority of front-line staff receive between 11-29 applications per day and spent 30 minutes or less to take down an application;
- Policy documents that regulate the implementation of new policy changes are not always available;
- Grant application files get misplaced or lost after processing;
- Staff carelessness is one of the main reasons why files get lost or misplaced and
- Front-line staff experience technical difficulties with the computer on a regular basis and it takes one to three days to resolve technical difficulties.

The second data-collection instrument was developed to collect data on the capturing of the application (questionnaire data-capturer) onto the SOCPEN system.

The empirical investigation revealed the following with regard to data-capturers:

- The majority of data-capturers have solid work experience as data-capturers in SASSA although some data-capturers have inadequate work space;
- Training on the implementation of new policy changes occurs irregularly;
- Supervision, mentoring and support from supervisors happen haphazardly;

- Data-capturers receive between 20 and 29 applications per day and they capture all applications successfully;
- Data-capturers receive support from colleagues on a more regular basis than from supervisors;
- Documents or guidelines that regulate the implementation of policy changes are not always available in the work place;
- Applications sometimes get misplaced or lost after capturing;
- No proper mechanisms are in place to record the movement of files, staff carelessness and either lack of office space or filing space, are the main reasons why applications get lost or misplaced;
- Data-capturers sometimes experience technical problems with computers and it takes one to less than five days to resolve technical difficulties;
- Data-capturers receive sometimes incomplete applications from the attesting officials (those staff officials who are responsible for taking down the application) and they usually take such applications back to the first attesting officer;
- Backlogs in the capturing and approving of normal applications exist and staff shortages and system-related problems are the main reasons why backlogs exist;
- Backlogs exist with regard to the capturing and approving of review cases and
- Staff shortages, a centralized review management approach, lack of office space and lack of connectivity points constitute the main reasons why review backlogs exist.

The third data-collection instrument (questionnaire pay-point team member) was developed to measure services at pay-points and to determine the problems experienced at pay-points. The empirical investigation revealed the following with regard to this category as seen by pay-point team members:

- Some pay-points are not disabled-friendly;
- There are not always enough chairs, toilet facilities or drinking water available at pay-points;
- Payment contractors and SASSA staff sometimes arrive late at pay-points;

- Payments are usually delayed between 15 minutes to less than an hour, but beneficiaries are not always informed about delays;
- There are sometimes broken machines at pay-points and this causes 15 to 45 minutes delay in payments;
- There is not always enough money at pay-points and it takes an hour to just under two hours to get more money;
- Grant recipients hardly ever receive wrong grant amounts;
- Hawkers and vendors operate mainly outside the pay-point;
- Security guards are available at pay-points and there is access control at pay-points (mainly driven by security guards from the payment contractor)
- Not all pay-points are fenced all round and
- First Aid kits are available at pay-points most of the time.

The fourth data-collection instrument (questionnaire for beneficiaries) was developed to target the beneficiaries who receive grant payments at pay-points. The empirical investigation revealed the following:

- Some pay-points are not disabled-friendly;
- There are not always enough chairs, toilet facilities or drinking water available at pay-points;
- Payment contractors and SASSA staff sometimes arrive late at pay-points;
- Payments are usually delayed between 15 minutes to less than an hour, but beneficiaries are not always informed about delays;
- There are sometimes broken machines at pay-points and this causes 15 to 45 minutes' delay in payments;
- There is not always enough money at pay-points and it takes an hour to less than two hours to get more money;
- Grant recipients rarely receive wrong grant amounts;
- Hawkers and vendors operate mainly outside the pay-point, but there are exceptional cases where they operate inside the pay-points;
- Beneficiaries do feel safe at pay-points most of the time;
- Beneficiaries mostly live within walking distance from the pay-point;

- Beneficiaries hardly experience problems at pay-points and if they do, their problems get resolved;
- Not all pay-points provide shelter from the elements;
- Beneficiaries are satisfied with the services SASSA renders and the grant has improved their quality of life.

Grant administration processes in SASSA are labour-intensive and officials play a vital role in the correct administration of social grants. The study has revealed that although there is clearly some strength in the grant administration process from application-to-approval up the payment of social grants at pay-points, it is unfortunately true that the weaknesses are overwhelming.

OPSOMMING

‘n Assessering van die sterk- en swakpunte binne die Suid-Afrikaanse Sosiale Sekerheidsagentskap in die Noord- en Wes-Kaap provinsies

Sleutelwoorde: maatskaplike toelaes, begunstigde, Suid-Afrikaanse Sosiale Sekerheidsagentskap, (SASSA), betaalpunt, betaalsiklus, eerste kontakpersoon, betaalpuntspanlid, prosesevaluering, implementerings-evaluering, SOCPEN.

Die navorsing was gemik op die assessering van die sterkpunte en swakpunte in die aansoekproses vir maatskaplike toelaes vanaf die aansoekpunt tot by die goedkeuring van toelaes insluitende die uitbetaling van toelaes by betaalpunte binne die Suid-Afrikaanse Sosiale Sekerheidsagentskap.

Die algemene doel van die navorsingsprojek was om die proses van maatskaplike toelaes vanaf die aansoek tot die goedkeuring, insluitende die uitbetaling van maatskaplike toelaes binne die Suid-Afrikaanse Sosiale Sekerheidsagentskap te assesser. Die spesifieke doelwitte van die studie was daarom:

- Om die huidige aansoek-tot-goedkeuringproses van maatskaplike toelaes te bespreek;
- Om die sterkpunte en swakpunte in die toelaagadministrasieproses te assesser ten opsigte van spesifieke administratiewe prosedures en strukturele aspekte soos ervaar deur die eerste attestingbeamptes, (beamptes verantwoordelik vir die afneem van die aansoek) data-invoerders (beamptes verantwoordelik vir die invoer van die inligting in die SOCPEN-stelsel soos dit verskyn op die aansoekvorm), betaalpuntbeamptes (beamptes verantwoordelik vir dienslewering by betaalpunte) en begunstigdes by betaalpunte; en
- Om ‘n verslag met betrekking tot die sterkpunte en swakpunte in die administrasie van maatskaplike toelaes vanaf aansoek-tot-goedkeuring, insluitende die uitbetaling van maatskaplike toelaes by betaalpunte aan hoofkantoor te voorsien.

Die studie is gedoen in twee provinsies, naamlik die Noord-Kaap en die Wes-Kaap. Verskeie kantore in die Noord-Kaap en Wes-Kaap was deel van die navorsing. Die

maatskaplike toelaagadministrasieproses vanaf aansoek tot goedkeuring sluit verskillende stappe in.

Die attesteringsbeampte kyk of alle vereiste dokumentasie vir 'n toelaagaansoek beskikbaar en korrek is (stap 1). Daarna word die aansoek deur die tweede attesteringsbeampte afgeneem en op die SOCPEN-stelsel ingesleutel (stap 2). Daarna vorder die aansoek tot by kwaliteitsbeheer (stap 3) waar die korrektheid van die aansoek nagegaan word. Dan word die aansoek elektronies geverifieer deur 'n verifiëringsbeampte, waarna die stelsel 'n brief genereer wat aandui of die aansoek afgekeur of goedgekeur is (stap 4). Beamptes by betaalpunte sowel as begunstigdes wat hul toelaag uitbetalings by betaalpunte ontvang was ook deel van die navorsing.

Vier verskillende data-insamelingsinstrumente is gebruik tydens die navosingsprojek. Die eerste data-insamelingsinstrument is ontwerp om inligting in te samel oor die toelaagaansoekproses en die swak- en sterkpunte in hierdie verband (vraelys attesteringsbeampte). Die tweede data-insamelingsinstrument is ontwerp om inligting in te samel oor die invoer van data in die SOCPEN-stelsel (vraelys data-invoering). Die derde data-insamelingsinstrument (vraelys betaalpuntbeampte) was ontwerp om dienslewering te meet by betaalpunte en om vas te stel wat die probleme by betaalpunte is. Die vierde data-insamelingsinstrument (vraelys begunstigde) is ontwerp om begunstigdes wat hul betalings by betaalpunte ontvang te teiken.

Die empiriese ondersoek het die volgende aspekte uitgelig met betrekking tot attesteringsbeamptes:

- Die meerderheid attesteringsbeamptes het meer as vyf jaar werksondervinding by SASSA;
- Die meerderheid attesteringsbeamptes het nie genoegsame werksruimte nie;
- Opleiding, toesig, mentoring en ondersteuning van toesighouers en kollegas geskied op 'n ongereelde basis;
- Die meerderheid attesteringsbeamptes ontvang tussen 11-29 aansoeke per dag en bestee 30 minute of minder om 'n aansoek af te neem;
- Beleidsdokumente wat die implementering van nuwe beleid reguleer is nie altyd beskikbaar nie;
- Toelaagaansoeke word verlê of raak verlore nadat dit geprosesseer is;

- Nalatigheid aan die kant van assesteringsbeamptes is van die hoofredes waarom toelaagaansoeke verlê word of verlore raak en
- Attesteringsbeamptes ondervind op 'n gereelde basis tegniese probleme met hul rekenaars en dit neem een tot drie dae om tegniese rekenaarprobleme op te los.

Die tweede inligtingsinsamelingsinstrument is ontwerp ten einde inligting in te samel rondom die invoer van data in die SOCPEN-stelsel. Die empiriese studie het die volgende aspekte uitgelig met betrekking tot data-invoerders:

- Die meerderheid data-invoerders het soliede werkservaring as data-invoerders alhoewel sommige onvoldoende werksruimte het;
- Opleiding oor die implementering van nuwe beleidsveranderinge geskied ongereeld;
- Toesig, mentoring en ondersteuning van toesighouers geskied ongereeld;
- Data-invoerders ontvang tussen 20 en 29 aansoeke per dag en alle aansoeke word suksesvol op die SOCPEN-stelsel ingevoer;
- Data-invoerders ontvang meer ondersteuning van kollegas as van hul toesighouers;
- Dokumente of riglyne wat die implementering van beleidsveranderinge reguleer is nie altyd binne die werksplek beskikbaar nie;
- Aansoeke raak soms verlê of verlore nadat dit op die SOCPEN-stelsel ingevoer is;
- Daar is geen meganisme in plek om die beweging van lêers te dokumenteer nie, terwyl nalatigheid aan die kant van beamptes, 'n tekort aan kantoorspasie of 'n tekort aan lêerberging as die hoofredes genoem word waarom lêers verlê word of verlore raak;
- Data-invoerders ondervind soms tegniese probleme met rekenaars en dit neem een tot drie dae om dit op te los
- Data-invoerders ontvang soms onvolledige aansoeke vanaf attesteringsbeamptes en daardie aansoeke word dikwels teruggeneem na die attesteringsbeamptes;
- Daar is 'n agterstand in die invoer van normale aansoeke terwyl 'n personeeltekort en stelselverwante probleme as die hoofredes daarvoor uitgelig word;

- Daar is 'n agterstand in die invoer van hersieningsaansoeke en
- 'n Personeeltekort, 'n gesentraliseerde hersieningsbestuursbenadering, 'n tekort aan kantoorspasie en 'n tekort aan netwerk aansluitingspunte word as die hoofredes uitgelig waarom 'n agterstand met betrekking tot die invoer van hersieningsaansoeke bestaan.

Die derde inligtinginsamelingsinstrument is ontwerp ten einde dienste by betaalpunte te meet. Die vierde inligtinginsamelingsinstrument is ontwerp met die fokus op begunstigdes by betaalpunte. Die empiriese studie het die volgende aspekte uitgelig met betrekking tot die twee kategorieë:

- Sekere betaalpunte is nie verbruikersvriendelik vir persone met gestremdhede nie;
- Daar is nie genoeg stoele, toiletfasiliteite of drinkwater beskikbaar by betaalpunte nie;
- Die betalingskontraakteur sowel as SASSA-beamptes arriveer dikwels laat by betaalpunte;
- Betalings word dikwels vertraag met tussen 15 minute tot net minder as een uur, maar begunstigdes word nie altyd oor vertragings ingelig nie;
- Daar is soms gebreke betalingsmasjiene en dit veroorsaak 15 tot 45 minute vertragings in betalings;
- Daar is nie altyd genoeg geld by betalingspunte nie en dit neem een uur tot minder as twee ure om weer geld by die betaalpunt uit te kry;
- Toelaagbegunstigdes ontvang selde verkeerde toelaaguitbetalings;
- Smouse opereer hoofsaaklik buite die betaalpunte;
- Sekuriteitsbeamptes is beskikbaar by betaalpunte en daar is toegangsbeheer by betaalpunte (hoofsaaklik sekuriteitsbeamptes van die betalingskontraakteur);
- Alle betaalpunte is nie toegespan nie;
- Eerstehulpkissies is die meeste van die tyd beskikbaar by betaalpunte;
- Begunstigdes woon meestal stapafstand vanaf betaalpunte;
- Begundigdes ervaar weinig probleme by betaalpunte en indien wel word hulle probleme opgelos;

- Daar is nie skuing teen die elemente by alle betaalpunte nie en
- Begundigdes is tevrede met die dienste wat SASSA lewer en die toelae wat hulle ontvang het hul lewenskwaliteit verhoog.

Die administrasie van maatskaplike toelaes is arbeid-intensiewe prosesse en beamptes speel 'n belangrike rol in die korrekte administrasie van maatskaplike toelaes. Die studie het getoon dat daar duidelike sterkpunte maar ook oorweldigende swakpunte in die administrasieprosesse van maatskaplike toelaes is vanaf die aansoek tot die goedkeuring, insluitende die uitbetaling van toelaes by betaalpunte.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AIDS	Acquired Immune-Deficiency Syndrome
ANC	African National Congress
AU	African Union
BIG	Basic Income Grant
CDG	Care Dependency Grant
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CSG	Child Support Grant
CPAC	Child Poverty Action Group
EC	European Commission
ESSPRSOSS	European System of Integrated Social Protection Statistics
FCG	Foster Care Grant
GIA	Grant-in-Aid
HIV	Human Immune-Deficiency Virus
ILO	International Labour Organization
ISSA	International Social Security Association
MLSGS	Minimum Living Standard Guarantee System
OAG	Old Age Grant
OAI	Old Age Insurance
OASI	Old Age Survivors Insurance
OECD	Organization for Economic Cooperative development
PDG	Permanent Disability Grant
TDG	Temporary Disability Grant
SADC	Southern African Development Community
SASSA	South African Social Security Agency
SPSS	Statistical Package for Social Scientists
SOCPEN	Social Pension System
WVG	War Veteran Grant